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Identical letters dated 28 September 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the thirty-first report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/796):

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the positions that it has previously communicated in its identical letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council responding to the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic believes that, like previous reports, the current report has failed to achieve its presumed goal, which is to review the humanitarian situation in Syria and enhance efforts to address it. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regrets that, in drafting the report, the Secretariat has strayed from its mandate. Indeed, the Secretariat is using these reports to mislead global public opinion about the true reasons why the humanitarian situation for Syrians is deteriorating. The report is also being used to level accusations against the Syrian Government and disparage the tremendous efforts that it is making to provide Syrians with basic services and support, combat terrorism and restore security and stability in all the regions and cities of Syria and thereby facilitate the rapid return of internally displaced person to their homes, so that they can resume their normal lives, and improve the humanitarian situation for Syrians in general. The Secretariat has also failed to meet the minimum standard of credibility, impartiality and objectivity in drafting the report and has continued to espouse the hostile position towards Syria adopted by certain influential States on the Security Council. Indeed, the Secretariat has continued to provide cover for the governments and organizations that have strived to exacerbate and prolong the crisis in Syria, supported terrorism, profited from the suffering of Syrians both within and outside the country, and hindered efforts to achieve a political solution based on intra-Syrian dialogue, thereby prolonging the humanitarian, social, and economic suffering of all Syrians, and the health crisis they have been enduring.

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The Syrian Government is surprised that the Secretariat persists in reiterating the same political and legal error that it had made previously by describing, in paragraphs 6, 7, 8 and 11, the armed terrorist groups as the non-State armed opposition, although the Secretariat is aware that those groups comprise Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Front for the Conquest of the Levant (the Nusrah Front), which are included in the Security Council list of individuals and entities associated with the ISIL and Al-Qaida terrorist organizations, as well as numerous, variously named, terrorist groups that are ideologically, financially and logistically linked to the two latter terrorist organizations. Syrian society has rejected the barbaric, extremist thinking of those groups, their poisonous ideologies and their brutal and inhumane practices. The Syrian Government also regrets that the Secretariat has failed to respond to our previous queries regarding the international legal basis for referring to organizations that are included in the Security Council list of individuals, entities and terrorist groups linked with the ISIL and Al-Qaida, and which constitute the backbone of the so-called Army of Conquest in Idlib and Aleppo, as the non-State armed opposition.

The Syrian Government has cooperated fully with the United Nations to support the humanitarian response efforts aimed at meeting the needs of Syrians under the present circumstances; the Government has provided all possible assistance, the lion's share of financial support for humanitarian operations and documented information on the key obstacles impeding the successful implementation of that response. Nonetheless, the Secretariat has refused to acknowledge the role played by the Syrian Government, ignored the factual information that we have provided it and relied on information sources that are misleading, politicized and biased against the Government. Some of those sources are directly linked to armed organizations and foreign intelligence services. The Secretariat has used the current report to tarnish the image of the Syrian Government on the world stage and to accuse it of responding inadequately to the humanitarian situation. The Syrian Government is therefore compelled to reiterate its demand that the Secretariat must correct the reports on the humanitarian situation in Syria that it submits monthly to the Security Council. The Secretariat must adopt a new approach to this matter, one that that is based on professionalism and objectivity. It is also important for the Secretariat to designate staff members who are better trained, more professional and objective, and not hostile towards Syria to oversee the drafting of these reports. The Syrian Government hopes that future reports will adhere to standards of professionalism, impartiality and objectivity.

It is regrettable that the Secretariat has worsened the humanitarian situation in Syria, instead of improving it. This is so because the Secretariat's current report, like its predecessors, contains a vast amount of exaggerated, politicized and misleading information, and fails to meet the minimum standards of professionalism, accuracy and objectivity.

Following is the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding certain aspects of the current report of the Secretariat:

1. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic deplores the disregard displayed by the Secretariat and those who drafted the report of the constitutional and legal right of the Government under international law to defend its people from terrorism, and particularly acts terrorism perpetrated by ISIL, the Nusrah Front and

associated terrorist organizations, and its right to purge armed terrorist groups from Aleppo governorate, where it is seeking to end the years of suffering that the governorate's people have endured owing to the presence of armed terrorist groups. The Government is striving to end the siege of Aleppo governorate and stop armed terrorist groups from using civilians as human shields and perpetrating brutal terrorist crimes against civilians. The Syrian Government notes that the measures it has taken in Aleppo governorate are directed against terrorists, not "non-State armed opposition groups". Those measures comply fully with international law and international humanitarian law, and operations have steered clear of populated areas and civilian or service facilities. The Syrian Government, in cooperation with its allies, has also opened humanitarian corridors to help civilians leave neighbourhoods in which terrorists are present and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the neighbourhoods of Aleppo. The Syrian Government regrets that Secretariat officials have failed to gather available information on the thousands of civilians who have been targeted by armed terrorist groups using gas cylinder "hell canon" missiles, or the civilians who have been targeted by terrorist sniper fire and gunfire while trying to use those crossings to move to safe neighbourhoods where there are no armed terrorist groups. Moreover, the Secretariat failed to note the recent attack by armed terrorist groups against a relief convoy organized by the United Nations and its partners that was heading to the Urum al-Kubra district.

With regard to the situation in Aleppo Governorate, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic underscores that it had complied fully with the cessation of hostilities called for in the agreement concluded by the Russian Federation and the United States of America. On the other hand, the armed terrorist groups continued to violate the cessation of hostilities; they and their supporters are responsible for the failure to implement the agreement and the resumption of hostilities. Violations by armed terrorist groups of the cessation of hostilities agreement have caused the deaths of more than 200 innocent civilians and more than 187 Syrian Arab Army soldiers.

2. The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's deliberate refusal to acknowledge that the successful delivery of humanitarian assistance provided by United Nations and international organizations to both stable and unstable areas, most recently in August 2016, would not have been successful without the assistance, cooperation and facilities provided the Syrian Government.

3. The Syrian Government deplores the manner in which the Secretariat addresses the events that took place in Darayya on 26 and 27 August 2016. The Government underscores that it liberated the people of Darayya from armed terrorist groups, which had used them as human shields. Civilians from Darayya were transferred to shelters where they are receiving the care and assistance they need. They will return home once repairs to their houses and key service facilities had been completed and the mines and explosives planted by the departing terrorists have been removed. The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's description of the Darayya terrorists, who fired hundreds of mortars indiscriminately at the inhabitants of Damascus and killed dozens of people, including children and women, as the non-State armed opposition. Perhaps the clearest evidence that those individuals should be described as terrorists is the fact that, as soon as they reached Idlib governorate, those individuals joined the Nusrah Front and other armed terrorist

groups and took part in armed attacks carried out by those terrorist groups against civilians in the villages and towns in the Hama countryside. It is a matter of deep regret that United Nations representatives in Syria deliberately exaggerated the number of civilians in Darayya, claiming that there were more than 4,000 in the town, when in fact there were only 492. Meanwhile, United Nations assistance was reaching armed groups there; this is something that is occurring in many parts of Syria.

4. The Syrian Government regrets that the Secretariat has continued to depend on unreliable and biased information sources whose aim is to provide misleading information and deliberately tarnish the image of the Syrian Government. Meanwhile, the Secretariat continues to ignore reports that focus on the crimes committed by terrorists and the Governments that are financing the terrorists and facilitating their passage into Syrian territory so that they can perpetrate massacres and exacerbate the humanitarian plight of Syrians. Perhaps the worst example of this is the reliance of the Secretariat on speculative and biased reports and information issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the reports of which have proven, time and again, to be lacking in objectivity, neutrality and credibility.

5. The Syrian Government deplores the failure of the Secretariat to state explicitly that ISIL and the Nusrah Front are terrorist organizations, and the failure of the Security Council, as yet, to characterize the Front for the Conquest of the Levant, the successor of the Nusrah Front, as a terrorist organization.

6. The Syrian Government regrets the attempts of the Secretariat to whitewash and promote the operations carried out by the so-called international coalition led by the United States of America. It furthermore regrets the wilful omission of any reference to the civilian casualties and massive infrastructure damage caused by the aerial bombardment, including, in particular, the targeting of power plants and electricity transmission and storage infrastructure in Aleppo, as well as well as economic and oil installations. At the same time, the Secretariat's refusal to acknowledge the efforts of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and its allies to combat terrorism, in accordance with Security Council Resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations is both disgraceful and unacceptable, and merely serves to demonstrate the malice and bias of the report's authors. How can a United Nations report ignore the killing of dozens of civilians in a raid carried out by French aircraft in the north of Syria?

In that connection, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic condemns the passivity of the Secretariat in addressing the violations perpetrated by aircraft belonging to the so-called international coalition, despite the fact that the Syrian Government has provided the Secretary-General with numerous lists documenting the impact of the operations of this "alliance", its targeting of economic infrastructure and Syrian civilians, and its recent deliberate, brutal and criminal attack against Syrian Arab Army soldiers who were fighting the terrorist ISIL organization in Dayr al-Zawr governorate and defending the inhabitants of that governorate from the atrocities of ISIL. Following that attack, ISIL, with the knowledge of and in coordination with the Americans, occupied Syrian Arab Army positions.

7. The Syrian Government stresses that paragraph 8 of the report demonstrates most clearly the unbalanced and contradictory approach of the

Secretariat to the situation in Syria, whether in respect of the insistence on using a term (non-State armed opposition) that is not a legal term and has no basis in international law, or on using that term to describe groups that are universally designated as terrorist groups, such as the Nusrah Front and several of its terrorist allies, including Ahrar al-Sham, Army of Islam and the Nur al-Din al-Zanki movement. The Syrian Government condemns the failure of the Secretariat and the governments that claim to be concerned about the welfare of the Syrian people to condemn explicitly the attack by the "non-State armed opposition" on villages in the Hama countryside that killed and injured hundreds of civilians and displaced thousands of families from their homes and villages, as acknowledged by the Secretariat in paragraph 8.

8. The Syrian Government condemns the Secretariat's wilful and repeated disregard of the catastrophic humanitarian repercussions for Syrians of the ongoing coercive unilateral economic measures imposed by the United States of America, the European Union and other States on the most vital service sectors, such as health care, education, energy, food, water and electricity, that provide for Syrians' daily needs and strengthen their resilience. By adopting that irresponsible approach, the Secretariat has obstinately refused to acknowledge that those measures are one of the main factors exacerbating the humanitarian situation in Syria. Moreover, Secretariat's position favours those States that are violating international law, international humanitarian law, human rights law and United Nations resolutions by imposing those measures against Syria.

9. The Syrian Government finds it regrettable that Secretariat continues to promote the cross-border delivery of assistance, even though it is clear that doing so is ineffective and that most of the assistance thus delivered falls into the hands of armed terrorist groups in the targeted areas. The notifications sent to the Syrian Government do not meet the minimum standard of credibility with regard to figures, data, number of beneficiaries and information on the parties that receive and distribute assistance to civilian beneficiaries. The Secretariat also continues to exaggerate the amount of assistance provided and express underserved thanks in that regard to certain Governments that are recruiting foreign terrorist mercenaries from around the world and facilitating their passage into Syria, and recruiting displaced persons in camps in neighbouring States, arming them and providing them with all support and facilitating their entry into Syria, so that they can attack the Syrian State and people and thereby serve the interests of those Governments.

In that connection, the Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations monitoring mechanism cannot verify that cross-border assistance is reaching its rightful beneficiaries, and has thus far proven to be incapable of doing so. We remind you that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are also the entry points through which arms, materiel and ammunition are smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Syrian Government confirms that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has failed to respond to that proposal.

10. The Syrian Government regrets that, in speaking of the obstacles to humanitarian access, the Secretariat failed to refer to the responsibility of armed terrorist groups, described as "moderate" by some Western Governments and radical regimes in the region, for obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to

areas where those groups are prevalent or have imposed siege. To give but one example, the Secretariat has not addressed the matter of the scores of missile attacks in which armed terrorist groups deliberately targeted power plants and transformer stations in Aleppo, causing power cuts and also disrupting the city's drinking-water supply. Nor has the Secretariat mentioned the targeting of humanitarian convoys by armed terrorist groups, most recently the joint convoy carrying humanitarian assistance to the Urum al-Kubra area.

11. The Syrian Government takes exception to the Secretariat's whitewashing, in paragraph 23 of the report, of crimes committed by the armed terrorist groups present in Yarmouk camp. The Secretariat ignores the fact that those groups, including the terrorist organizations ISIL, Ahrar al-Sham and the Army of Islam, were responsible for hindering the delivery of assistance by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to Palestinian refugees displaced from Yarmouk camp to the areas of Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham, having issued a statement declaring themselves to be the only parties authorized to supervise the distribution of aid and receive the aid convoys entering those areas.

12. The Syrian Government affirms the importance and centrality of the facilitation and support that it provides to United Nations organizations and programmes. During the reporting period, numerous medical evacuations were carried out and humanitarian assistance was provided to a number of Syrian communities and towns, without distinction. In particular, several patients were evacuated from the town of Madaya in Rif Dimashq, which also received humanitarian assistance, notwithstanding any international appeal (mentioned in paragraph 17) and irrespective of the Four Towns agreement, thanks to the efforts and swift response of the Syrian Government and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to the humanitarian and health needs of the town's inhabitants.

The Syrian Government reiterates that those who are behind the armed terrorist groups besieging the towns of Fu'a and Kafraya are the main reason for the failure to reach an agreement that would finally end the suffering not only in those two towns but also in Zabadani and Madaya.

13. The Syrian Government once again condemns the Secretariat's continuing bias towards the Turkish Government to the detriment of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians in Hasakah governorate who have been affected by that Government's deliberate closure of the Nusaybin border crossing and its refusal to approve United Nations requests for humanitarian assistance destined for Hasakah governorate to be brought in via that crossing. The Syrian Government reaffirms that the temporary closure of the crossing since December 2015, or almost nine months, is not for security reasons but rather for well-known political reasons. In short, it is aimed at increasing the suffering of Syrian civilians under siege in those areas by armed terrorist groups, notably ISIL, as well as by the Turkish Government.

14. The Syrian Government regrets the fact that the Secretariat continues to include in the report inaccurate or unreliable figures and statistics on the number of visa applications submitted by United Nations agencies. The correct information is that, in August, the Syrian Government approved 36 entry visa applications for staff of United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, and not 30 (as stated in

the report). The Syrian Government also approved several applications at the start of the present month of September, which will be included in its reply to the report of the Secretariat for September. As at 31 August 2016, it had approved the renewal of 85 visas, and not 44.

15. The Syrian Government finds it deplorable that the Secretariat should draw on reports of OHCHR that are neither credible nor reliable, specifically in paragraph 19, which cites alleged reports of events in Suwayda' central prison and recounts fanciful tales of what took place.

16. The report sets out information provided to the United Nations by the Syrian Government concerning the status of several of its local staff members who were arrested on charges of terrorism and cooperation with terrorists and had their cases referred to the competent courts. The Government is therefore surprised that the United Nations should refer to them as being detained.

17. The Syrian Government deplores the alarming consistency of the Secretariat's views, as set out in paragraph 9, with those of a number of Western Governments and certain regimes in the Arab Gulf region and Turkey that support terrorism, interfere in Syrian internal affairs and peddle solutions to the crisis in Syria that are conspicuously out of keeping with the aspirations and choices of the Syrian people.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its long-standing position that the country's crisis requires a political solution based on Syrian-led dialogue among Syrians, without outside interference or preconditions. It stresses that the political approach goes hand in hand with counter-terrorism efforts, which will continue until all armed terrorist groups active throughout Syria are eradicated. In that context, the Syrian Government emphasizes that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General must perform his duties and reminds the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any palpable improvement in the humanitarian situation will primarily depend on the creation of a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism in Syria and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on the Syrian people with no legal or moral basis.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its call on the Security Council to prevail on the States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from so doing, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and the financing thereof, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering unprecedented humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annexes issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex I to the identical letters dated 28 September 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Crimes and indiscriminate attacks committed by ISIL, the Nusrah Front, the Free Army, the Army of Islam, Ahrar al-Sham, the Army of Conquest and other armed terrorist groups and ignored by the authors of the report

- During the reporting period, attacks carried out by armed terrorist groups with, among others, mortar shells and explosive devices, killed 218 civilians, including 43 children, and injured 980 others, including 196 children.
- On 29 August 2016, armed terrorist groups bombarded neighbourhoods in Damascus and Rif Dimashq (including Bab Tuma, Mazzah, Arnus, the Harasta residential suburb and Sa'sa') with mortar shells, killing 16 civilians, including women and children, injuring scores of others, some seriously, and causing significant material damage.
- On 25 August, in the city of Aleppo, armed terrorist groups belonging to the so-called Nusrah Front, the Nur al-Din al-Zanki battalion, the Islamic Front, Liwa' al-Tawhid, the Badr Martyrs Brigade, the Emigrants Brigade and Northern Shield, located in the Rashidin, Dawwar Salah al-Din and Karam al-Jabal neighbourhoods, fired mortar shells, rockets and gas cylinder missiles at the Mogambo, Salah al-Din, Jam'iyat al-Zahra', Hamdaniyah, Furqan, Sayf al-Dawlah and Jabiriyah neighbourhoods, killing 6 persons, injuring 40 others, including women and children, and causing material damage to buildings, shops, vehicles and infrastructure.
- Likewise in Aleppo, armed terrorist groups belonging to the so-called Nusrah Front, the Nur al-Din al-Zanki battalion, the Islamic Front, Liwa' al-Tawhid, the Badr Martyrs Brigade, the Emigrants Brigade and Northern Shield, located in the Rashidin and Dawwar Salah al-Din neighbourhoods, fired mortar shells at the Khalidiyah, A'zamiyah and Salah al-Din neighbourhoods, killing 14 persons, including women and children, and causing material damage to buildings, shops, vehicles and infrastructure.
- On 25 August, armed terrorist groups fired 25 mortar shells at the Umm al-Sarj area of the city of Homs, killing a number of civilians. On the same day, other armed terrorist groups fired 14 mortar shells at the neighbourhoods of Thawrah and Harabish in Dayr al-Zawr, killing a number of civilians and injuring others.
- Numerous civilians, among them women and children, were killed and injured in all areas of the country, including as a result of landmine explosions in Hasakah, Homs, Safirah and Tall Aran in Aleppo.

Annex II to the identical letters dated 28 September 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Examples of humanitarian assistance delivered during August 2016 thanks to the facilitation provided by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations and other international organizations, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, in addition to the assistance provided by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, thanks to the facilitation of the Syrian Government, delivered to various governorates humanitarian food, non-food and medical assistance provided from inside Syrian territory by United Nations agencies. A total of 2,038,980 beneficiaries (407,796 families) received food parcels provided by the World Food Programme through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The number of beneficiaries of United Nations humanitarian assistance distributed from inside Syrian territory is estimated at 3,165,512 beneficiaries (630,025 families).

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, with various forms of cooperation from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, delivered to most governorates humanitarian assistance provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross from within Syrian territory. Estimates are that 128,793 food packages were delivered to 643,965 beneficiaries, in addition to the tens of thousands of packages of canned food, other food items and kitchen supplies delivered to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries.

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, with cooperation from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, delivered humanitarian assistance (food, non-food and medical items, water purifiers, wheelchairs and baby food) provided by United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and international non-governmental organizations in Syria. The assistance was distributed to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries in the governorates of Aleppo, Rif Dimashq, Dar'a, Qunaytirah, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Suwayda', Tartus and Ladhiqiyah.

- Between 2014 and May 2016, the total food assistance delivered to camp inhabitants by UNRWA, with the facilitation of the Syrian Government, amounted to 136,982 food parcels and 42,580 medical kits, which is in addition to the ongoing operation to provide them with non-food items, other foodstuffs and medical care. Palestinian refugees in Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham are Yarmouk camp inhabitants who were displaced from the camp after it was invaded by the terrorist organization ISIL, in collusion with the terrorist Nusrah Front and other armed terrorist groups present in the camp. UNRWA has ceased to provide its assistance to inhabitants of the Yarmouk refugee camp through Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham because the armed terrorist groups inside the camp issued a statement declaring themselves to be the only parties authorized to oversee the distribution of assistance and receive aid convoys entering Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham.